2015 State of the City Address

7:00 PM Feb. 23, 2015 Binghamton City Council Chambers

Introduction

Thank you Councilman Papastrat. I can always count on you for a gracious introduction. President Berg, members of City Council, distinguished guests, fellow residents, good evening.

Approximately fourteen months ago, I stood in these very chambers to take the Mayor's Oath of Office and deliver my inaugural address. I was proud to join local elected leaders, supporters, City residents, friends and family to usher in not only a new year, but a new chapter in Binghamton's history.

I spoke about opportunity — and the incredible opportunity I have every day to serve Binghamton residents.

I spoke about breaking with tradition — about government working smarter, thinking outside the box and making tough decisions.

I spoke about hope — the hope that while this community is no stranger to tough times, our success will ultimately be achieved because of people who no longer accept the status quo and believe in charting a new direction.

In my address tonight, you'll hear about progress and our successes, what work is left to be done and new plans for the future. You'll hear about strategies to overcome adversity; creative solutions to challenges that have plagued our City for decades; and a City government that's focused not on ideological causes or national issues, but on practical management and leadership.

You'll hear concrete ideas for the future of Binghamton, stories of people investing and believing in our City again, and ways that City Hall has retooled to meet the evolving demands of governing a 21st Century city.

Public Safety

There is no greater force for good in our community than the Binghamton Police and Fire Departments. These men and women represent many tenants of public service: courage, duty, honor, and sacrifice. I thank many of them for being with us tonight. They've also been very busy.

For example, the Binghamton Police Department responded to 50,591 calls in 2014. That's around 138 calls each day.

In the last 12 months, the Binghamton Fire Department has responded to more than 1,900 fire-related incidents, including 48 working structure fires. No one can forget the massive blaze at the Ellis Brothers furniture store on Water Street this past April. Without the quick-response and organized attack from our fire department, that fire could have engulfed an entire City block.

It's important both departments have new equipment, training and manpower. We worked with Senator Tom Libous to secure \$100,000 in new equipment through a New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services grant. The funds will help purchase a police firearm simulator, six police vehicle dash cameras and a LiveScan Fingerprint Processing System. Many thanks to Senator Libous for his efforts and commitment to public safety in our community.

The City also worked hard to secure two U.S. Department of Homeland Security Grants, including a \$100,000 SWAT team grant, funding state-of-the-art tactical radio systems and leadership training. For the Fire Department, a \$30,000 Urban Search and Rescue Grant will fund specialized water rescue boats and other equipment.

Last summer, the City of Binghamton's Police and Fire Departments hosted a full-scale emergency training exercise on the City's North Side. I joined other officials, railroad personnel and 25 local, state and federal emergency service agencies for the hazmat drill. The successful exercise was a testament to the readiness and professionalism of our public safety personnel.

Public safety continues to be a top priority. We are increasing the number of police officers, a group that had suffered after years of cuts. In my first year in office, I delivered on a pledge I made to the community, adding seven new police officers and creating one new civilian police position in my first year.

Among the additions are two School Resource Officers for East and West Middle Schools, giving school administrators peace of mind while providing our youth with an educational ally, role model and resource during a critical time in their development.

We partnered with Binghamton University and President Harvey Stenger to form the Police Partnership Initiative, assigning a dedicated Binghamton Police Officer with specialized duties directly related to off-campus university students.

The officer has been an important liaison between students, the Binghamton Police Department and the community, resolving public safety situations, providing early intervention for emerging problems and establishing strong relationships with university officials.

I thank President Stenger for this partnership, but above all for his visionary leadership of one of America's finest public academic institutions. Binghamton University continues to grow as an economic and cultural force in our community and we should welcome that growth with open arms.

We've formed a strong relationship with state officials, including New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, participating in his office's gun buyback program that took dozens of dangerous weapons off our streets and his inVEST Partnership, generating \$10,000 to help fund 26 bulletproof vests.

After a fatal shooting at a North Side apartment complex, the City worked with residents and management to find lasting solutions to various public safety issues. Since I talked with residents in August of last year and pushed for new safety measures such as cameras and private security, police calls to the complex have dropped by half.

This administration has put a full-court press on properties that host criminal activity, utilizing the City's "Property and Building Nuisance Reform Law," or "Lockdown Law" to hold landlords accountable. In April, I locked down the troubled 17 East nightclub on Clinton St., an infamous hub for drug trafficking and gang activity. The property was also the source of too many late night disturbances affecting the First Ward community.

Municipalities across New York State are following our lead in combating crime. Last April, the Village of Groton in Tompkins County adopted its own Lockdown Law, directly modeled after Binghamton's. In December, the City of Cortland did the same.

This administration will continue to use the Lockdown Law as a potent tool against criminal activity.

That assertive approach applies to our police patrols as well. Since taking office, I've been vocal about the need to direct more police into our neighborhoods, having a strong and visible presence throughout the City. That change has been paying off.

Recent statistics compiled by the Binghamton Police Department show a marked decrease in robberies and burglaries City wide. In 2014, we saw a 23 percent drop in robberies compared to the previous year. Burglaries dropped 36 percent in that same time frame. The Community Response Team, which we expanded by adding two officers last year, focused on these two areas. It's a strategic unit that saturates high crime areas and engages in proactive community policing.

We will battle criminals on the streets, where they live and where they set up shop. Within City limits, there will be no safe haven for those who break the law.

Last year, it was my privilege to welcome 10 new officers to the Binghamton Police Department at the Broome County Law Enforcement Academy graduation. Next month, 18 new rookies will start their training at the police academy, part of one of the largest and most diverse academy classes in Binghamton Police history.

These officers will face new and challenging circumstances when they graduate and put on that badge. Our community has seen an unthinkable spike in heroin-related crimes, which is why our police now carry Narcan, the heroin overdose reversal medication.

There is currently an impassioned nationwide discussion regarding the role of police officers in our communities. There are diverse viewpoints and opinions about how to improve relations

locally and at the national level. We must adapt and evolve to improve the way police protect our community.

The Binghamton Police Department has reviewed and updated its use of force policy. The Department has also instituted enhanced training for use of force situations, and later this year we will bring to Binghamton a national expert on the U.S. Department of Justice use of force protocol to further train our supervising officers. We must be proactive and not find ourselves, as many communities do, forced to react after a tragic, but potentially avoidable, incident.

Our commitment does not end there. Tonight, I'm announcing the City of Binghamton will purchase approximately 34 body cameras for police officers. This will be the first time in the Department's history that officers will be equipped with body cameras. Binghamton will be one of the few cities in Upstate New York to utilize this technology. In addition to our six new patrol car cameras, these new body cameras will better protect our officers, residents and the City while increasing accountability for everyone.

A report by the U.S. Department of Justice found the use of body-worn cameras has led to a "reduction in citizen complaints against the police and, in some cases, similar reductions in use of force and assaults on officers."

In Rialto, California, a city of roughly 100,000, a 12-month trial found that body-worn cameras reduced the use of force by roughly 50 percent and complaints against police by 90 percent. The Mesa Police Department in Arizona did a side-by-side study of 50 officers wearing cameras and 50 without. After eight months, the officers with cameras had eight citizen complaints while those without had 23.

The Binghamton Police Department is evolving and these steps will improve our relationship with the community, protect officers and citizens, and modernize our police department for the 21st Century.

Infrastructure

Our roads, bridges and water and sewer systems are the true foundation of our community. Investing in their improvements is one of my most important duties in managing the City.

I want to take a moment to thank the dedicated DPW and Parks personnel that maintain and plow our roads, sidewalks and bridges. These folks work hard around-the-clock on all 151 miles of City roadway. Day and night, rain or shine, these men and women are out there making sure residents can safely get to work and school. Their efforts are truly appreciated, and I know City Council shares my appreciation.

I also want to thank Gary Holmes, Commissioner of Public Works and Acting City Engineer who will be retiring this spring. Gary's passion and expertise is a big reason why 2014 was a record year for improvements to our City's infrastructure. Gary, you're a dedicated public servant and a friend. We'll miss you here at City Hall — thank you for your service.

In a review of New York State's infrastructure, Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli's office estimated that local municipalities are only spending about a third of what's necessary to keep up with deteriorating capital assets. Here in the City of Binghamton, we're bucking that trend. Last year, the City engaged in the largest, most-comprehensive infrastructure plan in decades.

Flagship projects included Phase One of Riverside Drive Reconstruction, a \$2.7 million investment and work in the Front St. corridor to lower the roadway under the railroad overpasses, as well as upgrades to utility, water and storm sewer lines and new traffic signals and lighting. State and federal grants funded that entire \$3 million project.

In 2014, we improved roughly 11 centerline miles of City streets, twice the work that was done the previous year. In every corner of the City, neighborhood streets were being paved, some for the first time in recent memory. When possible, we worked with our partners at New York State DOT, who invested hundreds of thousands in state money for local road repairs, like here on Bevier St. on the City's North Side and Prospect St. in the First Ward.

In all, \$7 million was spent on street, water and sewer improvements last year. This year, we will exceed that vigorous pace.

Nearly 13.5 centerline miles of streets will be reconstructed, milled and paved or microsurfaced.

That includes Phase Two of the Riverside Drive Reconstruction project, from Beethoven St. west to the Johnson City line. This \$3 million section will complete the two-year project, a combined \$5.7 million in pavement, sidewalk, curb, and water and sewer line improvements to one of Broome County's most heavily-traveled thoroughfares.

Front Street, from Clinton St. to Main St. will be milled and paved, as will a host of neighborhood streets like Clifton Blvd., Abbott, Beethoven, Mygatt, Leroy Streets and many, many others.

In 2015, more than \$8 million will be spent upgrading our transportation infrastructure, and water and sewer systems. Besides those general street improvements, the City will engage in many other strategic infrastructure projects.

The \$5 million Front Street Gateway project, which I remember being on the drawing board when I left City Hall in 2005, will finally begin this year. The project features full street reconstruction, new curbs, sidewalks, period lighting and water and sewer upgrades. As part of this project, the City will demolish the former Magic City Ice building. This dilapidated eyesore has shaped visitors' first impressions of Binghamton for decades. This year, the City will finally tear this building down.

After the Front St. mill and pave project from Clinton to Main is complete and the final top coat is installed on last year's railroad overpass project, Front St. from Main St. to Prospect St. will have been completely redone — something Binghamton residents, and especially travelers, have needed for years.

In another gateway improvement, the City secured \$480,000 in federal funding for the State Street Improvement Project, enhancing Downtown's streetscape, spurring new economic activity and beautification. The project will focus on improvements to Downtown's central gateway from Binghamton University, including new pavement and striping, period-style LED lighting, bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, and enhanced landscaping.

Binghamton's bridges and waterfront are set to see significant investment in 2015.

The Exchange Street Bridge will receive \$2.5 million in improvements. More than ten thousand vehicles drive over the Exchange Street Bridge every day. While closing the bridge for repair will be inconvenient in the short term, we must make investments to ensure this gateway to Binghamton's South Side stays open for decades to come.

Work to paint and repair the historic South Washington Street Pedestrian Bridge, costing \$1.5 million, will start in the spring and be completed this fall.

Installation of the Susquehanna North Bank River Trail will expand recreational opportunities and bring more people than ever to our beautiful waterfront, a truly underutilized feature of our City.

The \$700,000 project will construct a new two-thousand-foot trail from Confluence Park to the Exchange Street Bridge, between the Susquehanna River and North Shore Drive. It will also extend Binghamton's existing River Walk, the 1.5 mile trail that stretches from Confluence Park up the Chenango River to Cheri A. Lindsey Park on the City's North Side. Construction is scheduled to begin in late spring.

Residents are very familiar with the embarrassing condition of our three municipal parking garages. I remember in August 2006, a 7,000-pound concrete slab broke off the Water St. parking garage's exterior and plunged through a trailer near the Boscov's loading dock. While no one was injured, it was proof that maintaining the condition of the parking garages is as much a public safety concern as it is an infrastructure issue.

This year, these garages will receive roughly \$1.3 million in repairs and restoration, a first of many steps necessary to stabilize these facilities. The Collier St. garage will receive the least work, as we pursue various grant opportunities for development of a new mixed-use parking facility to replace it. These structures play a critical role in economic activity downtown and attracting visitors from around the region.

One of the most exciting infrastructure projects in generations will start this year — the conversion of all of the City's 7,000 streetlights to LED technology.

Johnson Controls, a global technology solutions firm, will manage the planning and installation of the LED bulbs, which will shine six to seven times brighter than the City's current street lights. The City's atmosphere will be much more inviting to residents, visitors and businesses — brightening our City and improving public safety. The public will notice an immediate difference once they are installed.

The energy and maintenance savings from converting to LED technology is expected to offset project costs, estimated at \$4 million. Switching to LED technology means less frequent service and replacement of the bulbs.

The project will be completed in 2016. In addition to converting streetlights, Johnson Controls is exploring LED technology to improve lighting in the City's parking garages and to beautify our historic bridges at night.

In total, \$28 million worth of projects are moving off the drawing boards this year to strengthen and modernize our City's infrastructure, quite literally paving the way for future growth and development.

JSTP

I want to take a few moments to discuss the most pressing infrastructure and environmental issue in our region: the Binghamton-Johnson City Joint Sewage Treatment Plant.

In December, I announced the next steps in an ongoing \$110 million project to revitalize the facility. An on-site pilot plant of a new treatment process in now online. The pilot facility is providing design engineers with critical data on the proposed system under various conditions before any full-scale implementation takes place. The pilot study should be complete in just a few months.

Since taking office, I've been committed to taking on the complex challenges at the sewage treatment plant and implementing comprehensive, long-term solutions. We have encouraging signs the plant is finally headed in the right direction.

This pilot plant represents a small part of a dramatic shift in philosophy for running the sewage treatment plant. I thank Johnson City Mayor Greg Deemie, who's here tonight, for his support and partnership on this and other issues. It's important to taxpayers and ratepayers that we work to control costs and put in place comprehensive and reliable systems that will work for decades to come.

Parks and Neighborhoods

In this administration's first year, we've brought a fresh perspective to improving quality of life through neighborhood improvements.

Many residents were overjoyed to see a street sweeper in their neighborhood for the first time ever. For others, it came as a sigh of relief as a team of code enforcement officials swept through their streets, cracking down on high grass, derelict properties and a variety of code issues. Our Code Enforcement Department completed eight code sweeps across Binghamton in 2014, which yielded more than 1,000 violations, 90 percent of which were brought into compliance before legal action was needed. I appreciate the work of Tom Costello, Supervisor of Building Construction, Zoning and Code Enforcement, and his staff for meeting my goal of cleaning up

our problem properties. There is still much work to do, and this initiative was so successful that we plan to expand the effort and conduct even more code sweeps this summer.

An aggressive vacant building demolition program remains one of our most powerful tools to attack blight, strengthen neighborhood integrity, eliminate repetitive nuisance activity and raise property values.

In 2014, the City leveled 13 properties as part of two strategic demolition waves. In 2015, we plan to attack more blight by doubling the amount of program funding to almost \$400,000.

For those single-family homeowners who need some help with renovations, the City secured a \$350,000 state home rehabilitation grant for improvements, HVAC upgrades or handicap accessibility projects. This program, which will roll out by construction season this year, aims to stabilize neighborhoods and upgrade our aging housing stock.

Sadly, there are residents of our City who don't have a roof over their head. Homelessness plagues every city in America, putting a face to the economic and societal woes we'd sometimes like to forget. When it came to veteran homelessness, I felt it was our moral duty to provide basic services for those who have served to protect our country.

In September of last year, I accepted The White House's Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, appointing a Blue Ribbon Commission of community leaders and experts in veteran and homeless issues to help veterans obtain housing as quickly as possible.

By November, the results were in. Federal officials came to City Hall and announced that of the cities that accepted the pledge, Binghamton was the first in America to end veteran homelessness, meaning Binghamton's 21 identified homeless veterans were off the streets and in various types of housing solutions.

Members of that Blue Ribbon Commission are here with us tonight, and I'd ask them to stand and be recognized for their tireless and patriotic efforts in meeting this challenge.

Many of our neighborhood development projects, whether it be vacant property demolitions or parks upgrades, would not be possible without federal Community Development Block Grant, or CDBG, funding. The City only receives roughly \$1.7 million in CDBG funds each year.

That's why it came as a shock when we discovered more than one million dollars in CDBG funds were left unspent under the previous administration — leftover money from closed-out initiatives, or pet projects that were funded but never got off the ground. While our City's neighborhoods were left to crumble and taxes grew by 50 percent in eight years, valuable federal aid was left on the table.

Tonight, I'm announcing plans to reallocate \$1 million in unspent federal funds for impactful community projects.

I plan on investing \$200,000 to reinstitute a first-time homebuyer program, giving applicants funds for a down payment, closing costs, and rehabilitation of a home in Binghamton. This program will incentivize owner-occupied homeownership in the City, improve neighborhoods and strengthen the tax base. The dream of homeownership is within reach, and we're going to help make that dream come true.

The remaining unspent funds will be used to make additional investments in our parks, neighborhood street reconstruction, youth programs, demolitions, focused crime prevention and much more. That's all without raising taxes one penny. Investments in these areas are consistent with the objectives of the City's comprehensive plan. Even so, as part of the process, residents will also have the chance to provide additional input and voice suggestions on how they'd like to see the money spent.

Under the direction of Parks Commissioner Bill Barber, Binghamton parks are in the best condition in years; judging by this photo, I know Councilman Chris Papastrat would agree. Maintaining and upgrading our parks are important to improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

In the past year, our parks have seen a lot of activity.

We completed \$30,000 in major restorations to the Ross Park and Recreation Park carousels.

The City hosted the New York State high school baseball championships at Conlon Field and the USTA Tennis Challenger at Recreation Park.

We partnered with Binghamton University students and the Binghamton Rotary for upgrades to Recreation Park's ball fields, including a new scoreboard.

We planted more than 150 trees throughout the City, solidifying Binghamton's status as a "Tree City U.S.A."

We removed the dilapidated First Ward above-ground pool, and we're working with Councilman Motsavage and various veteran groups to create a new World War II monument near the site. You can count on our support, Jerry.

We're continuing an existing plan to install a 300-seat amphitheatre at Ross Park, bringing new life to the fifth oldest zoo in America and a treasure of Upstate New York.

Adding to those successes, a number of fantastic parks and recreation projects are moving forward this year:

At the top of the list is OurSpace at Recreation Park — a banner \$800,000 dollar renovation designed for individuals of all ages, abilities and needs. Here's a first glimpse tonight at what the park project will look like. OurSpace will provide interactive and accessible features, including ball fields, garden areas, fitness equipment, reflective spaces and performance venues. Recreation Park will build on its legacy as one of the best recreational facilities in the Southern

Tier. Special thanks to Jen O'Brien for getting this project off the ground and Councilman Joe Mihalko for working very hard on making this project a reality.

The City also worked with Senator Libous to secure \$100,000 in park improvement grants. These grants will cover full-scale ball field and playground upgrades this year at West End, MacArthur and Valley St. Parks, providing pristine recreational facilities and attracting youth to participate in safe, supervised activities.

Facility upgrades to the First Ward Senior Center, including new HVAC and Wi-Fi systems, will keep that community hub up-and-running for years to come.

This year, the City will begin to formulate a comprehensive strategy for its parks facilities, something that's never been done, while researching ways to save costs while providing better recreational opportunities. We will rely on extensive community input throughout the process.

This photo is from the official opening of the Columbus Park spray pad last summer. The most excited face in that photo might be mine, but anyone who was there that day knows why — the spray park provides a safe, brand new feature for the City's youth to enjoy. While we worked hard to bring this project to fruition, the spray pad actually broke ground before I took office and those involved from City Council to the former Mayor should be congratulated on that initiative. Spray pads are a great feature and we're looking at adding others across the City.

Our City's youth have seen a wave of new hope and opportunity from the Youth Success Initiative under the leadership of Director Dr. Albert Penna.

Our new Science and Cultural Enrichment Program has touched the lives of countless Binghamton youth — especially those who are underprivileged — by providing access to free afterschool educational and fine arts programs from local partners such as the Roberson Museum, Kopernik Observatory and Tri-Cities Opera.

We introduced the Binghamton "First Tee" program that builds character and promotes healthy lifestyles through the game of golf. Our thanks to Dick's Sporting Goods Open, who has committed to an annual sponsorship of the program, which reaches more than 800 kids as part of the Summer Enrichment curriculum.

I've also visited dozens of classrooms in the Binghamton City School District and talked directly to students about their community — inviting their voice into City Hall for the first time. I've told these students that I'm the Mayor of everyone, not just their parents. One group, the Mayor's Student Advisory Panel, are academic standouts and leaders amongst their peers. Some of them joined us tonight as my special guests. I'd ask them to stand so we can thank them for their thoughtful input on ways to improve City government.

Stayed tuned in the coming months, as I'll be announcing even more partnerships for expanded youth programming in Binghamton.

Government Technology

For too long, local governments have lagged behind advances in technology. I'm committed to embracing new tools and systems and making Binghamton a leader in municipal technology.

We partnered with Broome County on an IT shared service program, savings tens of thousands in annual technology maintenance. Pilot projects are moving forward this year for joining Broome County's document management system and Voice Over Internet Protocol phone system, consolidating our telecommunications infrastructure for streamlined access and cost savings.

About a month ago, we launched the official City of Binghamton mobile app that puts City Hall in the palm of your hand. Residents can now submit and track their service requests directly through a smartphone. The app, utilizing GPS technology, pinpoints the exact location of the request — here's a map of all completed requests City-wide. Residents can include a photo and description of the issue, like graffiti removal, pothole repair and refuse collection. Since launch, we've seen almost 1,000 app downloads and have responded to close to 200 individual service requests.

We created a free community notification service that delivers text message and e-mail alerts to residents so they can stay informed about public safety. Through the Binghamton Police Department, alerts include real-time public safety information, traffic updates and emergency notifications.

We're also working with an Atlanta-based firm to study and manage the installation of micro cell towers on City-owned buildings and light poles. The project is aimed to meet the growing smartphone cellular data demand, but also boost revenue as the City will receive lease payments from cell carriers who install their antennas.

Simply put, public investments in technology can reduce costs, increase revenue and provide better services to residents.

Economic Development

As our City and Downtown continue to grow, we need the infrastructure in place to handle a rise in visitors and businesses. A firm, Nelson/Nygaard, has been selected to complete a comprehensive downtown parking study, which will be finalized later this year, giving us objective data and a strategic plan to make important parking policy decisions moving forward.

Another important project is securing a grocery store on the City's North Side. We've been working with a private developer and the Broome County Land Bank, which has earmarked \$300,000 from the Attorney General's Community Revitalization Grant for the project. I'd like to thank the Broome County Land Bank Board, which Councilman Papastrat sits on, County Executive Preston and the Broome County Legislature for their support of the City's project.

I've had multiple meetings and direct discussions with Attorney General Schneiderman on this issue and made sure he understood how important this project was to me and the City. North

Side residents have longed for this development and I'm confident we'll be able to identify additional funding sources and move forward with rehabilitation and redevelopment of the former Big Lots Plaza.

I've said many times that the government does not create jobs, but rather the environment where job creation and private investment can flourish. Before I took office, the environment was far from business-friendly and Binghamton had been overlooked on the state level for grants and other opportunities.

We've come a long way in one year. But don't take my word for it; take it from those who have chosen to put their resources, talents and investment dollars into the City of Binghamton.

Take it from the Ellis family, who after a devastating fire could've easily packed up and moved out of downtown. Instead, they doubled down — opening a temporary location on Court Street, while investing millions to renovate the former JC Penney building down the street, bringing new life to the Downtown gateway.

Take it from any one of the many food establishments that have opened within the last year: Social on State, Chatterbox, The Colonial, The Shop, and Taste of Europe. Binghamton is fast developing a reputation as <u>the</u> restaurant destination in the Southern Tier.

Take it from the Binghamton Senators, who extended their contract to keep professional hockey in Binghamton through 2019 at a time when many other Northeast cities have seen their franchises pack up and move west.

Take it from the Binghamton Mets, who extended their contract to keep professional baseball in Binghamton through the 2021 season, a few days before going on to win the 2014 Eastern League Championship.

Take it from Chenango Place and University Lofts, the multi-million dollar Downtown student housing developments that opened last year.

Take it from ScottTech, the high-tech manufacturing company that moved its headquarters to Binghamton, adding 14 high-paying engineering and manufacturing jobs steps from Downtown.

Take it from Mountain Fresh Dairy, the kosher dairy producer that worked with the Binghamton Local Development Corporation to redevelop the vacant Crowley plant on Conklin Ave. Mountain Fresh plans to hire <u>90</u> new employees over the next two years, 90, and spend millions to bring a once empty plant online for production.

But that's not all. Take it from McIntosh Labs, a company known around the world for its legendary handcrafted audio equipment, who has been a part of our community since 1956. Tonight, I'm pleased to announce that McIntosh will soon undertake a multi-million dollar, 45,000 square foot expansion at its South Side headquarters, moving manufacturing operations now in California back to Binghamton and creating space for new jobs and continued growth.

All these entrepreneurs, these innovators, these industry-leaders, their products have three words in common that I'm very proud of: "Made in Binghamton."

There are stories of success to be told about our City, and those stories are starting to spread statewide.

Binghamton, along with the Southern Tier, had a tremendous showing in Albany for the Regional Economic Development Council Awards. Of the \$81 million awarded to the region, \$10 million was awarded to projects located in the City of Binghamton, leveraging more than \$50 million in private investment.

Notable projects to receive REDC funding include:

Newman Development Group's \$25 million project to transform a blighted and vacant Front St. hotel into a dynamic, mixed-use housing development on Binghamton's riverfront. Demolition is scheduled to begin later this year.

SUNY Broome's \$13 million restoration of the historic Carnegie Library, the future home of the college's Hospitality Education Center, which is now moving forward.

Downtown anchor Security Mutual Life's new \$8 million parking facility. The company is currently interviewing firms to construct the facility, set to break ground this year.

Greater Binghamton Development's \$5 million project for a mixed-use residential building for the vacant parcel at Court and State Street. Construction is scheduled to begin later this year.

AVRE's \$1.7 million equipment upgrade and modernization project for its paper manufacturing operations is slated for completion this summer.

Construction will begin this year on Binghamton University's \$19 million, 35,000-square-foot Southern Tier High Technology Incubator, a project from a previous REDC round.

It's because of bold ideas and a collaborative attitude that we can form new partnerships, attract new companies and expand job opportunities. As the newest member of the Southern Tier REDC, I'm looking forward to this year's process. Binghamton finally has a seat at the table and I like our chances at bringing home millions more in State funding.

One of our top priorities is to secure funding for Collier Street Commons, a mixed-use parking and market rate housing project for downtown.

As many of you know, in January, Governor Cuomo announced a \$1.5 billion economic revitalization competition to restore economic opportunity to regions across Upstate New York. Three of seven eligible upstate regions will receive \$500 million, a half-billion dollars, for transformative projects focused on revitalizing urban communities, strengthening critical infrastructure, creating new jobs, growing tourism and improving quality of life.

Binghamton, along with the Southern Tier, will compete for its share of the funding. In Binghamton, many are calling the initiative the *Binghamton Half-Billion*, modeled after the "Buffalo Billion." Earlier this month, we launched a website as a centralized hub for information and community engagement.

Barring any holdups with the State legislature, the competition will formally launch in April. I've already started working with our many partners to focus on targeted investment in urban areas to drive community revitalization. We must develop a competitive plan bring ideas off the drawing boards and into reality.

This is our chance, a once in a lifetime opportunity. Binghamton has had its economic setbacks — our comeback starts now.

Finances

Tonight I've talked about many of our successes, but there are concerns we're working to address. Topping the list are the City's finances.

We have straightened out the City's past difficulties in filing audits and other reporting documents on time. We've also maintained our municipal bond rating — notable achievements for City Hall compared to previous years. Our goal in the next few years is to restore the bond rating to its original top level.

I'm concerned about the City's constitutional tax limit, which is currently 94 percent. Let me say that again, 94 percent. If that doesn't concern you it should. 94 percent is too high and puts Binghamton in a category with just a few other cities in New York State.

That's why in our 2015 Budget, residential property taxes only increased 0.48 percent — one of the lowest year-to-year tax increases in two decades. I thank City Council for its bipartisan support of that budget, and I know they share in this administration's wish to eliminate the wild tax swings we've seen in the past.

Residential and commercial taxes are too high, strangling business owners and residents, and are a main contributor to what can be summed up as "a devastating property value death spiral," which essentially makes neighborhoods a less desirable place to live, and commercial properties less attractive, which results in the decline of market prices.

There's no doubt many of you remember waking up to this Press & Sun-Bulletin headline from last year. I've talked at length about what kind of message Binghamton's property tax rates have sent to residents and businesses. They will locate somewhere else if nothing changes.

Our plan to combat this issue must be comprehensive. We did not arrive in this position overnight, and it will not change tomorrow, but we still must act with urgency. We need to increase our revenues and attract more businesses and residents to grow the tax base, in addition to creative municipal cost-saving strategies.

That's why we refinanced some of our old bonds, a move that will save close to a million dollars in interest payments over the next 15 years.

I outlined a strategy to fix the \$4.2 million deficit we inherited in the City's Sewer Fund, caused by inflated revenues and questionable budget tactics. Our goal is to make progress in closing this gap this year.

We've secured a number of grants from a diverse range of state and federal agencies, some of which I detailed tonight. Here's a quick list of some of the more substantial grants we've secured, totaling almost \$2.5 million. Grants enable us to expand our umbrella of projects and services without significantly adding to our tax bill. This administration has taken an aggressive approach in pursuing grant opportunities.

Grants are a critical component of our financial strategy. Just to put this in perspective, if local tax dollars had to pay for these initiatives, residential taxes would have to increase almost seven percent. We've demonstrated an ability to bring new money into this community. It is my pledge to increase this amount significantly moving forward to benefit the taxpayers.

In all, we've formed a long-term, calculated approach to municipal finances.

So, what's our next step? Avoiding tough financial decisions is not an option. It's not a governing style I subscribe to or that residents deserve. The City can't cut its way to prosperity, but we owe it to taxpayers to research ways that will maintain levels of service while reducing costs.

We constantly review every department for savings. The bulk of our services, and expenses, are within the Police, Fire and Public Works Departments. Combined, these departments represent \$44.3 million, or 65 percent of our annual general operating budget. These are the areas we must focus on to achieve significant and long term savings for taxpayers. This year, we will work with all three departments, and their respective unions, to identify savings where possible. This will be an in-depth and challenging process. But I know we will work together and identify savings with minimal impact on services.

Conclusion

As Mayor, I have the privilege of meeting residents from all walks of life: Bankers and construction workers, nurses and professors. Single moms, entrepreneurs, teachers, veterans — people who are proud of their City and want what's best for its future. These folks work hard. They want a City government that works hard for them.

The projects and initiatives I've outlined tonight are ambitious, no doubt. We've shaken up the status quo. City Hall works smarter, moves faster and is more transparent and responsive to the community than ever before. I want to recognize the hard work of my administrative team and all City Hall employees for the progress that's been made.

I also want to mention City Council. One reason the Administration's projects, proposals and initiatives are moving forward is because on multiple occasions Council members crossed party lines and showed their support. While not always unanimous, each of you has voted in favor of one or more of this Administration's priorities. Several of you told me on day one you wanted to work together, and you have. I recognize and appreciate the bipartisanship. Council President Berg, I look forward to working with you as you lead this body in 2015.

It was Winston Churchill who said, "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

Ladies and gentlemen, Binghamton is far from perfect, but for the first time in a long time, people are starting to take notice of the change and believe in our City again.

I remember this past fall when our hometown Binghamton Mets won their first Eastern League Championship in 20 years. Six-thousand fans packed NYSEG Stadium, thunderous cheers rang out after a game-winning, walk-off double in the bottom of the ninth. In that moment, Binghamton was back on top. It's a feeling this City hadn't had in a long time.

If you leave here tonight with one message, let it be this: Binghamton is back in the game.

In New York State, Binghamton finally has a place at the decision-making table. Our transformative ideas for economic development and revitalization are putting this City back on the map. We're seeing tens of millions of dollars being invested and exciting new projects, big and small, popping up each day.

We've received federal recognition for innovative solutions to the veteran homeless epidemic. Binghamton was number one in the United States for all the right reasons.

And here locally, in these chambers and around our community, we're seeing a shift in attitudes. More and more people believe that Binghamton's story has not already been written.

We're <u>not</u> just another Rust Belt city whose best days are behind us. <u>We</u> will be the ones who ultimately decide what type of community this will be.

On this road ahead, I will stay focused, stay energized and stay optimistic. Above all, I will stay true to the vision I've outlined tonight, a vision to make Binghamton a safer, more vibrant and more prosperous City for generations to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, the State of our City is strong, and getting stronger every day!

Thank you, and goodnight.